DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 345 815 JC 920 300

AUTHOR Shreve, Chuck; Wildie, Avace
TITLE PASS--Placement/Advisement for Student Success.
PUB DATE 28 Jan 92
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Winter Institute on Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success (1st, Jacksonville, FL, January 25-28, 1992).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Advising; *Academic Persistence; Career Counseling; Community Colleges; Counselor Teacher Cooperation; Educational Counseling; Faculty Advisers; Mentors; Post High School Guidance; *School Holding Power; *School Orientation; *Student Personnel Services; Student Placement; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *Northwestern Michigan College

ABSTRACT

In 1985-86, Northern Michigan College (NMC) used funds received from the United States Department of Education to develop a system of assessment, advisement, and placement--Placement/Advisement for Student Success (PASS), an integrated system designed to improve student retention. PASS currently consists of three components: summer orientation, advising, and a computerized orientation program. During a one-day summer orientation, students complete the Assessment of Skills for Successful Entry Transfer (ASSET). The program also includes an orientation for parents, mini-sessions led by faculty and counselors, advising by paid faculty PASS advisors, tours of the campus, and registration. The PASS advisor system provides the student with a faculty or counselor mentor who assists in course selection, provides academic (including transfer) and career advice, and monitors the student's progress throughout the year. The computerized orientation program, NMC Experience, consists of ten modules and quizzes that students complete at their own pace. NMC Experience focuses on career planning, student success skills, student activities, health services, academic advising, and understanding college facilities. The results of the PASS program have been impressive. Ninety-six percent of student participants surveyed indicated that they were very satisfied with the PASS system. Retention rates for those students assigned an advisor were 72% in 1987-88, 67% in 1988-89, 74% in 1989-90 and in 1990-91, and 84.3% in 1991-92. PASS advisors surveyed reported a renewed relationship with counselors and students, and a high degree of satisfaction with the program. PASS also generated important data on entry-level student skills and needs, and led to an increased utilization of computer technology. (JSP)

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Northwestern Michigan College

PASS--Placement/Advisement for Student Success

January 28, 1992

Chuck Shreve, Director of Enrollment Services

Avace Wildie, Director of Counseling

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Northwestern Michigan College
PASS--Placement/Advisement for Student Success
Tuesday, January 28, 1992
11 a.m.-12:15 p.m.
Chuck Shreve, Director of Enrollment Services
Avace Wildie, Director of Counseling

In 1985-86, NMC received funding from the U.S. Department of Education to establish a system of assessment, advisement, and placement to improve opportunities for student success.

Approximately 95 percent of the students who enter NMC each year drop out prior to completing a program of study. While we realize that some students never intend to complete a program of study and that other circumstances beyond our control mitigate in the dropout decision (such as lack of money, work/family obligations), NMC did not have an integrated system of student assessment, advisement, and placement to facilitate student growth and success.

We have learned through exit interviews with all students who leave the college before completing their program objectives and through annual ACT assessment, that there are several reasons why students fail to succeed and subsequently drop out:

1. Selection of inappropriate careers due to a mismatch of skills,

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talents, and/or personality characteristics.

2. Lack of commitment to a program or vocation.
3. Changing career fields after entering college and losing credits as a result.
4. Stress due to indecision about career choice.
5. Limited opportunity to benefit from the fraternal spirit evident among career-specific students.

To retain students at NMC, we developed a comprehensive system of assessment, advisement, and placement so NMC can provide pre-enrollment counseling and placement testing, career exploration, continuous academic advising, tutoring and expanded placement services. To implement such a system, NMC needed additional computer support and faculty/staff training, all of which was provided through the U.S. Department of Education grant. The overall grant goal was to increase retention at NMC by 10 percent from 1985-87.

The following objectives were accomplished:

1985-86

By November 1, 1985, provide opportunities and direction for students in self-assessment and career exploration.

NMC hired a full-time testing coordinator to assist students with self-assessment and career exploration; to evaluate computerized student test data; coordinate all vocational, achievement, and personality test administration; and to provide support for academic advising.

NMC purchased two microcomputers and two DISCOVER software packages to help students identify and select career choices.

By December 1, 1985, NMC provided a method to assess learning ability levels of incoming students through implementation of ACT/ASSET.

NMC hired a computer programmer to establish a student data flow retrieval program for student retention.

By January 1, 1986, provide a monitoring and follow-up system which assures that all student who have not selected a career option or program of study will do so by the time they have earned 30 credits.

An instructional designer was hired to work with the computer programmer on developing modules for an extension of our Orientation

program entitled the NMC Experience.

By September 1, 1986, provide all first time college students with a computerized orientation program.

The college purchased nine microcomputers and installed them in a computer/classroom laboratory for use with a software program designed by the instructional designer and computer programmer.

1986-87

By November 1, 1986, NMC developed an academic advising program.

Consultants from Selection Research Inc. provided in-service training to at least one faculty member in each division for effective career counseling/academic advising. The faculty who received the in-service training were given one-quarter release time to establish academic advising activities within their respective division. Ten CRTs and ten printers were purchased and installed in each of the academic division offices on campus for easy access of student record information.

By January 1, 1987, provided a system of placement services.

A consultant from Synergistic, Inc. conducted in-service training to counselors, division directors, and the director of career planning and placement who, in turn, developed and implemented a series of placement workshops to address successful transfer after NMC and successful job-seeking skills after program completion.

By July 1987, the program coordinator developed a retention model to evaluate the effect of assessment, advisement and placement to determine if the goal of a ten percent increase in retention was achieved from 1985-87. This was presented to the Board of Trustees in April of 1987 and resulted in a continuation and expansion of the program to the present date.

Presently our PASS advisor system has three components; Orientation, Advising, and the computerized orientation program entitled the NMC Experience.

NMC's orientation program begins at 7:30 a.m. and ends at 3:30 p.m. We orient 200 students for each of six orientation programs in the summer.

This program includes ASSET, a parents' orientation, mini sessions lead by faculty and counselors, advising by paid faculty advisors entitled PASS advisors, tours of campus, and registration.

Students complete the ASSET (Assessment of Skills for Successful Entry Transfer) for the assessment of basic skills for course placement. The ASSET system is a microcomputer scoring reporting database system which allows us to program our own report for the student at orientation. Scoring time is approximately an hour and a half for 200 students. The advising report includes an interpretation of the basic skills for writing, reading, and math for NMC course placement in addition to educational plans and help requested. A week before the beginning of the Fall term, advising and various Students Services departments are sent mailing labels from those students requesting assistance. Then these departments reply to the student concerns through their own personalized approach.

The ACT ASSET Microcomputer Scoring Reporting Database System has helped enable NMC to process and manage ASSET data. The ASSET system enables us to perform the following functions:

Scan and score answer folders; save individual student records.

Print ASSET Student Advising Reports tailored to the responses of each student and the specific course placement recommendations and resources of NMC.

Print reports and mailing labels for all students or for students with selected common characteristics, and create files which can be used with a word processor to produce personalized letters.

Create a diskette of ASSET data to send to ACT for use in developing institutional research reports.

The ASSET System includes a machine-readable response document that contains the Educational Planning Form (EPF) and the assessment answer folder.

Once students have completed ASSET, they can attend 20-minute mini sessions including financial aid, honors, housing, learning resources, and transfer/technical career information. We then break the orientation group into thirds and the Counselors give a presentation which includes records/registration information, transfer, and an explanation of ASSET as well as the NMC Experience. During this time the parents have a session lead by the Dean of

Student Services which includes residence hall policies, tutorial services, financial aid, student activities, and a tour of the campus.

The second component of our current PASS advisor system is the assignment of new students to counselors and PASS faculty advisors known as the PASS advisor system. The advisor is viewed as a mentor who assists in scheduling and monitoring a student's progress throughout the year. PASS advisors are paid for this service under separate contract depending upon the number of students assigned to them through Perkins "At Risk" funds. PASS advisors are recommended by Division Directors to the Director of Enrollment Services prior to the beginning of the academic year. The pre-selected advisors are trained by counselors in the areas of listening skills, program content, advisor referral mechanics, and scheduling procedures. Students are assigned to advisors by academic major and all "undecided" students are assigned to counselors. The assigned students cannot register unless they see a counselor or faculty advisor for a signature on their schedule. The responsibilities for a PASS advisor include:

1. To advise students about the selection and scheduling of classes.
2. To advise students about the transferability of programs and courses to their institution.

3. To advise students about support services available at the college.
4. To help students identify their academic strengths and weaknesses and plan their educational strategies accordingly.
5. To help students make good career and academic decisions within the discipline.
6. To know important dates on the academic calendar, such as final registration, drop and add deadlines, final exams, etc.
7. To be able to interpret ASSET scores.
8. To meet with each advisee at least once each term.
9. To teach a one hour lecture session of the NMC Experience for Fall and Winter terms.
10. To be available to students during final registration periods.
11. To sign-off on advisees' registration forms.
12. To attend a minimum of one college-sponsored advisor workshop annually.

Other Duties

Advisors are not expected or encouraged to be involved in personal counseling involving emotional problems or disturbances or health related issues. Students with such problems should be referred to a counselor.

Career testing and transfer counseling outside a PASS advisor's area should be referred to a counselor.

Advisors should convey a warm and caring attitude toward advisees.

Advisors should keep a list of the names and addresses of their advisees.

Advisor pay is determined based on the number of students assigned, for example; 6-9 students = $55.00, 10-19 = $110.00, 20-29 = $160.00, and 30+ = $215.00 This process is completed for fall and winter terms only for a total cost of $11,000 per year. We have assigned 1200 students this past fall 1991 term to PASS advisors and counselors.

The third component is a computerized orientation program aimed at helping new students become familiar with the services of this college which is entitled NMC Experience. The NMC Experience is a program comprised of ten modules and quizzes that students complete at their own pace. Special attention is given to career planning, student success skills, student activities, health services, academic advising and understanding college facilities. An enhancement of the 1991-92 program includes word processing. All new

students taking six-plus credits are required to complete this half-credit course led by counselors and PASS Advisors.

Currently the NMC Experience is run on the Quest Authorizing System version 2.42 on DOS compatible PC's attached to a Novell Netware network. The current system is written in CGA graphics mode due to the limitations of the current equipment, but we will be replacing the old technology with new 386 class VGA compatible PC's for the Fall of 1992. At the same time we will be converting from version 2.42 of Quest to the new 3.02 version, that will support the VGA graphics. While providing better graphics capabilities the new features will allow easier modules maintenance, better student performance feedback, and advanced animation tools. Quest 3.02 also has interactive video support and digital audio options.

The results of the PASS advisor program are impressive. The student surveys of the orientation program indicate that 96 percent are very satisfied. The PASS advisors when surveyed indicated a renewed relationship with counselors and a high degree of satisfaction with the program from the tools necessary for advising such as the Advisor Handbook, ASSET scores, computerized student schedule to the enjoyment of advising students outside the classroom. Retention rates for those students assigned an advisor beginning in the Fall of 1987 through Spring 88 was 72%, Fall 1988 through Spring 1989 at

67% rate of retention, Fall 1989 through Spring 1990 at 74%, Fall 1990 through Spring 1991 was 74% and of those students assigned this past Fall 1991, 84.3% have returned this Winter 1992 term.

In summary, the NMC PASS advisor and NMC Computerized orientation program have resulted in an increasing rate of student retention, an increased relationship for counselors and faculty, higher degree of satisfaction for faculty outside the classroom, data for entry level skills and student needs, a utilization of computer technology and a probable increase in enrollment.

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